



AFF GIVES SURVEILLANCE WEAPONS TO THE GENOCIDAL SRI LANKAN GOVERNMENT

SUNDAY 18 APRIL – The Tamil Refugee Council has condemned the Australian government for supplying five aerial drones to the Sri Lankan Police just as there are new warnings that the political situation in Sri Lanka is deteriorating.

Australian Border Force [claims](#) that the drones will be used in a wide range of “crime fighting” activities. But the very fact that the gift has been made by the Joint Agency Taskforce Operation Sovereign Borders – Australia’s military-led, “border security” operation, one of whose primary responsibilities is to “deter and disrupt” asylum seekers – is an indication that the drones will likely be used to help prevent Tamils from fleeing Sri Lanka and to monitor political activists.

While the Australian government is increasing the Sri Lankan police’s surveillance capacities, the Sri Lankan government faces renewed scrutiny at the United Nations Human Rights Council for its domestic “assault on justice”, the UN noting patterns of increased harassment of civil society groups.

A recent Human Rights Watch report also says that, under the government of Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the media is self-censoring and security forces are carrying out “intense surveillance and harassment” of Tamil families who have been campaigning know the truth about what happened to thousands of people missing since 2009. In the opening months of that year, the Sri Lankan military killed tens of thousands in the final stages of the Tamil national liberation war.

There has been no progress in investigations into war crimes and crimes against humanity under Rajapaksa, who, as secretary of defence, oversaw the military’s offensives in 2009. Since becoming president two years ago, Rajapaksa has rejected all efforts aimed at government accountability and justice for the Tamil genocide.

This is not the first time that the Australian government has supplied the genocidal Sri Lankan state with equipment. In 2013, Prime Minister Tony Abbott gave the country two patrol boats to help prevent Tamils from fleeing the country to seek asylum. That was widely seen as part of a quid pro quo. As the Australian’s south-east Asia correspondent Amanda Hodge noted in 2015:

“Sri Lanka’s new prime minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, claims the Australian government’s silence on alleged human rights abuses was the price it paid to secure co-operation from the former Rajapaksa government on stopping asylum-seeker boats.”

Abbott as much as confirmed this in Quadrant online the following year:

“I’m sure that the Sri Lankan president was pleased that Australia didn’t join the human rights lobby against the tough but probably unavoidable actions taken to end one of the world’s most vicious civil wars. Certainly, both countries became even stronger partners in the Abbott government’s most urgent initial task: to end the people-smuggling trade.”

It seems that history may be repeating itself. Just when there are fresh international criticisms levelled at the Sri Lankan regime, the Australian government has stepped in to offer renewed aid to the war criminals in Colombo.

The Tamil Refugee Council is calling on the Australian government to stop providing the Rajapaksa government with equipment and weapons that could in any way aid its ongoing oppression and persecution of Tamils.